

Christian meditation integrates faith into daily life

You only have to look at the role technology plays in our lives, particularly in the lives of young people, to recognize that we are in an age of instant response and gratification. It is an age of limited analysis where consumerism runs rampant and opinion masquerades as fact.

As American bestselling author Matthew Crawford put it: "In a culture saturated with technologies for appropriating our attention, our interior mental lives are laid bare as the resource to be harvested by others," he wrote in *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in the Age of Distraction*.

That is why the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board should be applauded for displaying leadership in developing a program of Christian meditation.

The board, which overlaps the Dioceses of Hamilton, London and St. Catharines, educates more than 10,000 students. Its Christian meditation program, which complements other forms of traditional prayer in schools, is an example of



how smaller boards are providing leadership in Catholic education.

Christian prayer meditation is very different from mindful meditation or meditations rooted in other religious practices. It really is entering into prayer at its heart. It is but one type of prayer — along with prayers of blessing and adoration, prayers of petition, prayers of intercessions, prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of praise — and does not replace religious education classes or other forms of prayer or family life classes.

Christian meditation dates back to the third and fourth centuries, a time when Christians were fleeing difficult lives to seek solitude in the

desert. St. Anthony of the Desert is regarded as the first practitioner of this sort of formalized meditation and soon others joined. St. John Cassian went into the desert in Egypt to study with the Christian hermits. Later the Benedictine community further developed Christian meditation along with other forms of prayer.

Centuries later, Fr. John Main, an Irish Benedictine monk, worked with lay people in the 1970s to rediscover the ancient traditions of Christian meditation. In 1977, he was invited by the Montreal archbishop to establish a small Benedictine community dedicated to the practice and teaching of Christian meditation. Since that time, Main's mission of restoring contemplative prayer to the everyday life of Christians has been continued by Fr. Laurence Freeman, the Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Christian meditation is rooted in the Christian tradition. It is a method of being still and listening to God. It focuses on the present and calls students to be still and

to listen to the voice of God, or as Psalm 46:10 says: "Be still, and know that I am God."

In a 2006 address to the bishops of Switzerland, Pope Benedict XVI said one of the fundamental tasks of pastoral care is to teach people how to pray and how to learn to do so personally and better. Christian meditation teaches students how to be still in a culture that sees waiting and silence as things to be avoided.

In the Brant Haldimand Norfolk board, Christian meditation does not replace other forms of prayer. It complements them. It is integrated with the religious education national program and with the secondary Catholic curriculum and with the graduate expectations which affect all students. Bishops of the dioceses have been supportive of the approach and have seen the benefits of students participating in this type of prayer.

Catholic educators have a daily responsibility to live out the mandates of our faith and demonstrate how faith can be integrated into the daily living experience of students. Christian meditation is

one way to help achieve that goal. It helps students enter deeper into spirituality as Catholics and to see prayer and action as important elements of faith.

This is just one example of the many unique programs being developed by school boards in the area of religious education with the support of local bishops. It is exciting to see new programs that challenge and inspire students. Christian meditation will soon be discussed by the bishops of Ontario as this movement begins to influence more school boards across the province.

The administrative staff at Brant Haldimand Norfolk deserve congratulations — along with trustees, support staff and chaplains — for developing this program. It is just one thread in the rich tapestry of spiritual practices that adorn the Catholic faith, and it is fitting that it is now being presented to students.

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